When Cambridge received the inaugural Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Culture of Health Prize in 2013—awarded to six communities nationwide—the city became part of a national movement to change how communities think about health.

“Good health is more than having a doctor and insurance—it’s also about having opportunities for education and employment; feeling safe; having a strong social network; and living in a community that supports healthy choices,” said Claude Jacob, the city’s Chief Public Health Officer.

The affluent face of Cambridge often masks profound issues experienced by the city’s less-advantaged residents. A Culture of Health begins by visualizing a future in which all of us—regardless of age, income, race, ethnicity, or disability status—have an equal shot at good health.

“Imagine a culture that empowers everyone to live the healthiest lives that they can, even when they are dealing with chronic illness or other constraints.”

— Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey
RWJF President and CEO
Dear Friends,

The Cambridge Public Health Department (CPHD) has set an ambitious agenda to become one of the first nationally accredited health departments in the Commonwealth. Earning this designation will help identify community priorities and address the health needs of those who live, learn, work, and play in Cambridge.

Our department analyzed health burdens, examined social and economic trends, and listened to city residents and other stakeholders. Using this information, we completed a comprehensive health assessment in 2014 and engaged partners in developing a health improvement plan for the city.

We also looked inward. As part of a strategic planning process, we asked ourselves what we could do better or differently to build a stronger culture of quality within our department.

I believe that together we can build a lasting Culture of Health in Cambridge through strong partnerships and thoughtful planning. We are deeply appreciative of the community’s ongoing support of our efforts and we invite you to join us on this journey to better health.

Claude Jacob
Chief Public Health Officer
Cambridge Health Alliance
City of Cambridge
VISION, MISSION & VALUES

Vision
The Cambridge Public Health Department is a leading, innovative, and model agency that facilitates optimal health and well-being for all who live, learn, work, and play in Cambridge.

Mission
The Cambridge Public Health Department improves the quality of life for all who live, learn, work, and play in the city by preventing illness and injury; encouraging healthy behaviors; and ensuring safe and healthy environments.

Shared Values
Professionalism and Excellence
Innovation
Collaboration
Social Justice and Equity
By early 2015, the health department will have completed the three prerequisites for national accreditation:

Community Health Assessment
The 2014 City of Cambridge Community Health Assessment features local data on health and other topics. It also explores community perceptions of social, economic, and environmental issues that can impact health and well-being.

Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)
The plan will set the city’s health agenda for the next five years. Priority areas are healthy eating and active living; violence; mental and behavioral health; substance abuse; healthy, safe, and affordable housing; access to health care; and social justice and health equity.

CPHD Strategic Plan
The strategic plan will focus on internal priority areas that will help the department fulfill its mission and ensure a strong future for the department.
HEALTHY EATING & ACTIVE LIVING
Health Priority

GOAL: Make it easy for people to improve health and well-being through healthy eating and active living.

Cambridge is a city that has embraced healthy eating and physical activity, according to Assessment participants, who praised the city’s farmers markets, innovative physical education programs in the schools, and healthy school meals. Participants also shared concerns about obesity, food insecurity, and cultural and cost barriers to healthy foods and fitness options.

City and community partners will continue to use environmental and policy approaches to make fitness opportunities, sustainable transportation options, and affordable healthy foods and beverages available to the community, especially low-income residents. Several transportation strategies will address how pedestrians, bicyclists, and cars can share the road safely.

“Cambridge generally feels like a very active city, but I do think that more could always be done in this area... such as around affordability of healthy foods and exercise options.”

— Assessment survey respondent

Bollywood dance classes were among nine community projects that received CPHD “mini-grants” (co-funded by Cambridge Whole Foods stores) in 2014 to promote healthy eating and diverse, affordable fitness opportunities.

At three Cambridge farmers markets, residents can buy fresh food using SNAP (formerly food stamps) benefits. In 2014, a coalition coordinated by CPHD leveraged $13,000 so that SNAP shoppers could double their purchasing power up to a $15 value per visit at these markets.
VIOLENCE

Health Priority

GOAL: Establish a new community norm that strives for peace and justice, and provides a comprehensive approach to address all forms of violence.

Violent crime in Cambridge is at its lowest level since the late 1960s.¹ Still, many people who participated in the Assessment expressed concern about personal safety in public spaces. Domestic violence—particularly among immigrants and young people—and bullying were also frequently cited concerns.

Citywide strategies will mainly focus on addressing interpersonal violence, such as gender-based violence and school bullying, through restorative practices, mediation, and other ways of promoting nonviolence for a diverse range of residents, including youth and parents.

Domestic assaults accounted for 33% of all aggravated assaults in Cambridge in 2013.³

“There is a need to understand the cultural differences that underlie domestic violence.”

— Assessment interview participant

¹ Cambridge Police Department, 2013 Annual Crime Report.
MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE ABUSE
Health Priority

GOAL: Support and enhance the mental, behavioral, and emotional health of all, and reduce the impact of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Mental & Behavioral Health
Mental and behavioral health were identified by many Assessment participants as an important priority for the city. Specific concerns included depression and anxiety among elderly, youth, and immigrant populations, and mental disorders among homeless residents. Stigma, shortage of services, cost, and accessing services in other languages were cited as barriers to care.

Citywide strategies will focus on improving access to services—especially for adolescent, elderly, immigrant, and GLBT residents—and raising awareness and understanding of mental health issues among public employees and residents.

“There is a lack of knowledge about mental health and a reluctance to use mental health services and seek mental health treatment, especially among new immigrants.”

— Assessment interview participant
MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Health Priority

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse, particularly among youth and homeless individuals—was mentioned by many Assessment participants. Specific concerns included teenage drinking and marijuana use; prescription medication abuse in adults and youth; and alcohol and drug abuse among homeless residents. Nearly 15% of Assessment survey respondents identified tobacco smoke in outdoor locations as a top environmental health concern.

Citywide strategies will focus on reducing substance abuse and overdoses through changing social norms around youth access to alcohol and drugs; training more people to respond to opioid overdoses; implementing educational programs in the schools and community; and addressing gaps in services.

“Some kids don’t know the health risks of taking drugs.”

— Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (CRLS) senior and three-sport athlete

Unlike marijuana, alcohol and tobacco use have been on a downward trend among Cambridge public high school students since 2006. The health department’s Reality Check campaign encourages parents to talk to their teens about marijuana and alcohol.
HEALTHY, SAFE & AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Health Priority

**GOAL:** Ensure a socioeconomically diverse community through the preservation and expansion of high quality, healthy, and safe housing that is affordable across income levels.

The end of rent control in the mid-1990s spurred substantial and ongoing increases in Cambridge rents and property values. A shortage of affordable housing—especially for middle class residents—and homelessness were top issues for many Assessment participants. Other housing concerns included indoor air quality, pests, mold, and the safe removal of lead and asbestos.

Citywide strategies will focus on expanding housing and access to supportive services for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness; preserving and expanding affordable housing for low and moderate-income residents; and addressing patterns of recurring or uncorrected housing code violations.

“I’m afraid that the middle class will become non-existent in Cambridge as housing costs continue to rise, and that homelessness will increase further.”

— Assessment survey respondent

2. City of Cambridge 2014 Census of Persons Experiencing Homelessness. Note: On Jan. 30, 2014, there were 207 people in transitional housing units; 297 people in emergency shelter beds; and 47 people who were unsheltered.
PROGRAMS

Disease Outbreak Investigation
Enforcement of Health Laws
School Health
Children’s Oral Health
Tuberculosis Care
Men’s Health
Indoor Air Quality Investigations
Lead Poisoning Prevention
Asthma Home Visits
Early Childhood Literacy

The health department offers the community an array of vital services. Some CPHD programs respond to urgent health matters, such as foodborne illness outbreaks and treating sick or injured children in the public schools. Others set the stage for a healthy life, such as the Let’s Talk! early literacy program and environmental health services that reduce hazards in the home.
A child’s first three years of life are critical for brain development. Let’s Talk! is an early literacy program, based at the health department, that helps children from birth onward enter school ready to learn.

“Talking, singing, reading, and telling stories to young children prepares them to learn to read and write,” said Jen Baily, coordinator of the Agenda for Children Literacy Initiative, which runs Let’s Talk!

Since 2002, Let’s Talk! has been sharing strategies with Cambridge families about having interactive conversations with their babies, toddlers, and preschoolers in the language parents speak best.

“Parents of young children are busy,” said Baily. “We encourage them to think about how talk will fit into their everyday activities.”

“Now I know it’s important to speak in my own language.”

“I am more aware of asking [my child] questions or including more detail.”

— Cambridge parents interviewed after Let’s Talk! home visits

Let’s Talk! launched an awareness campaign in 2014 featuring posters, bus ads, and city billboards promoting the benefits of talking with young children.

Parents and children play, sing, and read together at community playgroups facilitated by staff from the Literacy Initiative and Center for Families.
POLICY, PLANNING & ADVOCACY

Tobacco Policy
Nutrition & Physical Activity
Violence Prevention
Substance Abuse Prevention
Emergency Preparedness
Climate Change Planning
Biosafety
Epidemiology

The health department develops policies and advocates for change to improve the health and well-being of all people in Cambridge. Activities range from advocating for tougher tobacco laws and using geographic information systems (GIS) to map chronic diseases to preparing 27 communities for health emergencies and contributing to the city's climate change planning efforts.
A child of any age can buy flavored e-cigarettes at Cambridge convenience stores. Unregulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, e-cigarettes contain varying amounts of nicotine, a highly addictive and harmful chemical. Under current city law, youth over 17 can legally purchase any tobacco product, including colorfully packaged, candy or fruit-flavored “little cigars” that sell for under $1 each.

To keep pace with the tobacco industry’s aggressive marketing to youth, the city’s Tobacco Advisory Committee, led by CPHD, proposed tobacco ordinance amendments in 2014 that address youth access and other issues. When enacted, youth under 21 will be prohibited from buying tobacco or nicotine-delivery products; cigar pricing and packaging will be restricted; many retailers will no longer be allowed to sell flavored tobacco products; and smoking in certain public parks and outdoor restaurant seating areas will be prohibited.

“E-cigarettes are easy to get, easy to hide, smell good, and there’s no real regulation.”

— Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (CRLS) student and member of the CRLS chapter of The 84, explaining the popularity of e-cigarettes among some of her classmates.

9% of Cambridge public high school students are current cigarette smokers.¹

5% of Cambridge public high school students are current e-cigarette users.¹

MEDIA RELATIONS
Health Marketing Campaigns
CPHD Website
Data Reports
Posters, Brochures & Fact Sheets

The health department is a key source of timely, accurate, and credible information on health issues impacting the city. Through health marketing campaigns and other communication strategies, the department empowers residents to make healthy choices. In addition, the department seeks to engage the public in local health issues through citywide health fairs, community meetings, and annual events, such as National Public Health Week.

CPHD created a series of flyers in multiple languages to encourage immigrant residents to get a flu vaccine. The images and messages were developed based on input from African-American, Bangladeshi, Ethiopian, Haitian, and Portuguese residents.
COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT

Data Spotlight

The 2014 City of Cambridge Community Health Assessment reflects existing data and a range of community voices, including those of city officials, civic leaders, parents, youth, seniors, immigrants, and people with disabilities.

Many people who participated in the Assessment spoke about “upstream” issues affecting their health, such as safe and affordable housing; stigma associated with mental illness; income inequality; and the high cost of health insurance and deductibles.

In addition to Assessment interviews and focus groups, over 1,600 people participated in the 2013 Cambridge Community Health Assessment Survey.

When compared to U.S. Census data, survey respondents were similar to the overall Cambridge population on many characteristics, though survey respondents were more likely to be female.

Top Health, Social, Economic, Environmental, and Safety Concerns

2013 Cambridge Community Health Assessment Survey Findings

- **Top health concerns affecting survey respondents, their families, or close social circle**
  - Cost of medical, dental, or mental health care (41%)
  - Age-related conditions (like Alzheimer’s) (40%)
  - Being overweight or obese (39%)
  - Mental health (36%)
  - Cancer (32%)

- **Top social and economic issues affecting health in Cambridge identified by survey respondents**
  - Lack of affordable housing (47%)
  - Homelessness (44%)
  - Alcohol and other drug abuse (42%)
  - Poverty (32%)
  - Lack of affordable child care (29%)

- **Top environmental health and safety issues in Cambridge identified by survey respondents**
  - Sharing the road¹ (51%)
  - Climate change (30%)
  - Safety for bicyclists (23%)
  - Housing conditions² (22%)
  - Rodents (21%)

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¹ Full entry: Sharing the road: safe interactions between motor vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians
² Full entry: Housing conditions: indoor air quality, pests, mold/moisture
Health department programs touch the lives of many residents. Here is a data snapshot of services offered in 2014.

84
Men who participated in Men’s Health League programs in 2014. In addition, the annual Hoops ‘N’ Health sports tournament and health fair attracted approximately 700 people, including 200 players.

188
Communicable disease reports that required follow up by public health nursing and epidemiology staff in 2014.

7,700
Books distributed to families and child care providers through Let’s Talk! in 2014. Staff also made 144 home visits to Cambridge families to share information about literacy, child development, and community resources; and led 39 workshops for parents and caregivers.

2,778
Cambridge school children (pre-K–4) screened for tooth decay by the Healthy Smiles program during the 2013–2014 academic year. Of these students, 17% were referred for treatment.

1,024
Licenses & permits issued in 2014 related to laboratory biosafety, laboratory animals, indoor ice rinks, tanning salons, body art, bodywork, burials, and funeral directors.

120
Home visits by Cambridge-Somerville Healthy Homes staff to families of children with asthma and elevated lead levels who reside in Cambridge and surrounding communities.

2,130
Patient visits to the Schipellite Chest Center at Cambridge Hospital for evaluation and treatment of latent and active tuberculosis in 2014. The Cambridge tuberculosis program is operated by the Cambridge Public Health Department.

1,306
Free flu shots administered at public flu clinics, homeless shelters, and other venues in fall 2014.

46,712
Cambridge Public Schools student visits to CPHD school nurses for illness, injury, medication administration, and medical procedures during the 2013–2014 academic year.
MORE INFORMATION

CPHD Governance, Responsibilities & Budget (2014)
www.cambridgepublichealth.org/publications

2014 City of Cambridge Community Health Assessment
www.cambridgepublichealth.org/publications

Cambridge Public Health Department website
www.cambridgepublichealth.org
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Richard C. Rossi
City Manager
City of Cambridge

Patrick Wardell
Chief Executive Officer, Cambridge Health Alliance
& Commissioner of Public Health
City of Cambridge

Cambridge City Council
Mayor David P. Maher
Vice Mayor Dennis A. Benzan
Councillor Dennis J. Carlone
Councillor Leland Cheung
Councillor Craig A. Kelley
Councillor Nadeem A. Mazen
Councillor Marc C. McGovern
Councillor E. Denise Simmons
Councillor Timothy J. Toomey, Jr.

Cambridge Public Health Subcommittee
Cambridge Community Health Advisory Group
Cambridge Public Health Department Staff

Editors: Susan Feinberg, Erin Dillon
Photo Credits: Susan Feinberg, David Oziel
Design: Pinkergreen